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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1408
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2373

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: FM MEREDOV, LESS BRIEF, LESS
TERSE, COMMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: ASHGABAT 0403

Classified By: CDA RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4 (B), (D)

11. (C) In an April 1 follow-up to their March 31 meeting (ref), Charge found a significantly relaxed Foreign Minister Meredov. Though he had promised only 10 minutes, the meeting extended to 45 minutes.

12. (SBU) Meredov confirmed Turkmenistan would participate in the Summer 2008 TIFA meeting in Dushanbe, welcomed a proposed April visit by Under Secretary Reuben Jeffery, and reported he had kept his previous day's promise to push forward registration for the Ashgabat International School. He said he expected the annotated working draft of the Memorandum of Understanding to be returned to the Embassy by April 4. He added, "And we will get the Turkmenbashi American Corner reopened, too."

HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

13. (C) When Charge asked if Meredov wanted to bring up any issues, the Foreign Minister said, "In fact, yes. I've studied the latest Human Rights Report (HRR), and there are some not very pleasant things in it." Although he did not have the document in front of him, in his usual lawyerly way he enumerated many examples of what he called "old information and outright mistakes." He said, "I could understand this if it came from a private Internet site, but a State Department document has authority." Meredov listed in great detail the steps the government has taken under President Berdimuhamedov to repair damage from the past, identify what needs to be done, and to move forward. He noted that USAID was meeting again today with the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights to elaborate their cooperation program. He said, "We are truly committed to this, I am watching it personally, but for many reasons we can only go so fast." Charge praised the Institute's openness and spirit of cooperation.

14. (C) Meredov added, "As evidence that we continue to move

forward, there will be a private presidential decree today or tomorrow on one more freedom-of-movement case." When Charge noted one of the Embassy's female Locally Employed Staff had still not been permitted to travel to Moscow for medical care, despite a previous intervention, he sighed and said, "I will get this done."

15. (C) Charge told Meredov the annual HHR, despite its flaws, about which even some U.S. ambassadors complain, still has real value because it flags areas for improvement and, especially for governments that take their human-rights commitments seriously, does indeed lead to corrections and advances. Charge explained that the current format and content of the report, for the most part, are Congressionally mandated, but acknowledged his personal view that it could stand some revision. He added he personally would like to see it slimmed down and better focused so that it would be more effective. Charge previewed that he might soon deliver a human-rights non-paper suggesting concrete, achievable next steps the Government of Turkmenistan could take and proposing enhanced, as well as new, cooperation. Meredov said he would welcome such a document. He added, "One page looking forward is more valuable than 50 pages looking backward."

16. (C) COMMENT: Meredov is an enigma. He was more relaxed and forthcoming than we have seen him in six weeks -- almost the opposite of his nervous terseness on March 31. But we will take him as he comes -- is there any other choice? -- and continue to press forward the bilateral relationship at every opportunity he gives us. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND